

## Chapter-2

# The Advocate of Unity: Sardar Patel's Legal and Political Contributions

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### Abstract

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, known as the "*Iron Man of India*," was a significant figure in establishing the country during its early years. As a barrister, Patel was well-known for his legal knowledge, which he later used to become a key player in India's independence struggle. His legal career, which was distinguished by a reputation for opposing British authority, paved the way for his political career. Patel was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and adopted the concepts of satyagraha, leading successful campaigns against repressive British laws and earned the title "*Sardar*" for his leadership.

Following India's independence in 1947, Patel served as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs, where his most famous achievement was the integration of over 560 princely states into the Indian Union. To ensure a smooth transition, this huge endeavor requires not just political knowledge, but also a thorough comprehension of legal structures. Patel's actions helped to prevent India from becoming balkanized, preserving the country's unity and stability during a vital moment. His legacy as a unifier and nation-builder is commemorated yearly on National Unity Day, and his contributions to India's legal and political landscape were honored with the Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian award, in 1991.

**Keywords:** Independence Movement, National Congress, Iron Man, Non-Violence, Justice

## **Introduction**

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was a key leader in the Indian Independence Movement, recognized for his unflinching dedication to national unity and commanding leadership. He was an educated lawyer who rose to prominence in the Indian National Congress by pushing for civil rights and farmers' interests. His strategic abilities earned him the moniker "*Iron Man of India*," particularly for his efforts to integrate over 500 princely kingdoms into the Indian Union after independence.

Vallabhbhai Patel, India's first Deputy Prime Minister, played a crucial role in shaping the country through his policies and actions, particularly in integrating princely states and maintaining law and order. Patel, also known as the "*Iron Man of India*," is credited with integrating more than 560 princely states into a unified India during its transition to independence in 1947. His legacy has continued to inspire generations as a symbol of honesty, tenacity, and the desire of a united nation.

Vallabhbhai Patel was a lawyer and statesman who played an important part in India's war for independence and subsequent integration. Patel's legal career began in 1900, and he immediately established a reputation for his accurate case presentation and challenge to British authorities.

After being impressed by Gandhi in 1917, Patel changed his lifestyle and looks, devoting himself entirely to the Indian independence movement. Although he did not completely agree with Gandhi's moral principles, he adopted his satyagraha. Patel served as Ahmadabad's municipal commissioner and president. He led campaigns opposing the government's tax policy, earning the appellation "*Sardar*" for his efforts.

Following India's independence in 1947, Patel served as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs and States. He is credited with bringing over 560 princely states into one undivided India. Patel's efforts ensured the country's unity as it transitioned from colony to sovereign nation. His contributions were posthumously acknowledged with the

Bharat Ratna in 1991, and his birth date is observed as National Unity Day.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was born on October 31, 1875, in Nadiad, Gujarat, to Jhaverbhai and Ladba Patel. Patel was up in the rural and practiced Vaishnavism. He married Diksha from the Pushtimarg sect. After working hard and earning money, he travelled to England at the age of 36 to pursue a law degree at the Middle Temple. Patel returned to Ahmedabad and established himself as a prominent barrister before entering governmental life.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, began his political career as Ahmedabad's Sanitation Commissioner in 1917. Between 1924 and 1928, as Chairman of the Ahmedabad Municipal Committee, Patel implemented important improvements in urban planning, sanitation, water supply, making the municipality a people driven institution.

### **Patel's Background in Shaping Leadership Style:**

Vallabhbhai Patel's background significantly shaped his leadership style, marked by practicality, decisiveness, and a focus on Indian self-reliance.

In 1917, Mohandas K. Gandhi influenced Patel, who thereafter adopted Gandhi's satyagraha. Although Patel supported Gandhi's nonviolence strategy, he did not fully embrace Gandhi's moral principles, seeing their universal applicability as impracticable for India's urgent needs. Despite these disparities, Patel vowed to assist Gandhi, adjusting his look and lifestyle to better reflect traditional Indian practices.

Patel's early career included serving as Ahmadabad's municipal commissioner and president, when he organized large-scale protests against unfair taxation. His strong leadership in the 1928 Bardoli campaign gave him the appellation "*Sardar*," which identified him as a nationalist leader. Patel's realistic and determined style, which some saw as brutal, established him as a strong figure in the Indian independence movement. He emphasized Indian self-reliance

and, unlike Gandhi, did not believe Hindu-Muslim unity was required for freedom.

### **Patel's Views on Justice and Law:**

Vallabhbhai Patel's ideas on justice and law were molded by his legal background and active participation in India's freedom movement. As a lawyer, Patel was noted for his thorough and strategic approach to legal affairs, emphasizing the significance of a well-prepared case. His legal practice, particularly in criminal law, was distinguished by a stress on precision and clarity, which most likely informed his ideas on justice as anchored in fairness and the rule of law. In politics, Patel was an important role in the Indian independence struggle, working alongside Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. His dedication to justice extended to his efforts to unite India following independence.

Patel was a key figure in the integration of princely states into the Indian Union, arguing for a unified legal and administrative structure to assure stability and justice throughout the newly independent country.

Patel's beliefs on justice were reflected in his pragmatic approach to governing. He felt that strong institutions and the rule of law were necessary for maintaining order and progress. His leadership style was frequently described as decisive and practical, reflecting his idea that justice must be executable and enforced in order to function effectively.

### **Influence of Law on Patel's Style:**

Vallabhbhai Patel's legal experience heavily affected his leadership style and response to political difficulties. Here are some important ways that his legal training and experience influenced his style:

- i. Analytical and Strategic Thinking:** As a lawyer, Patel honed his analytical talents, which he applied to political and administrative issues. His ability to appraise circumstances, weigh facts, and predict results enabled him to make informed and strategic judgments, especially throughout the arduous process of integrating princely states into India.

- ii. Emphasis on Preparation and Detail:** Patel's law practice required thorough preparation and attention to detail, which he carried over into his political career. He was recognized for being well-prepared and diligent in his duties, whether negotiating with princely nations or overseeing administrative responsibilities.
- iii. Negotiation and Diplomacy:** Patel's courtroom experience sharpened his negotiating abilities, which were critical in his capacity as India's first Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs. He effectively convinced and bargained with the leaders of various princely nations to join the Indian Union, employing diplomacy, persuasion, and, if needed, strength.
- iv. Pragmatism and Realism:** Patel's legal training influenced his approach to problem resolution. He concentrated on practical solutions rather than ideological viewpoints, which helped him navigate India's difficult political scene after independence.

### **Legal Career and Patel:**

Vallabhbhai Patel's legal career began after he passed the district pleader's test, which qualified him to practice law. In 1900, he established an independent district pleader's office in Godhra before moving to Borsad two years later. As a lawyer, Patel was noted for his accurate case presentation and aggressive cross-examination of police officers and British judges. To advance his legal career, Patel proceeded to London in August 1910 to study at the Middle Temple, where he graduated with honors. After returning to India in February 1913, he stayed in Ahmadabad and immediately rose to prominence as a criminal law advocate.

### **Legal Challenges in India faced by Patel :**

During the 1940s, India faced tremendous legal and political obstacles as it transitioned to independence. Vallabhbhai Patel played an important role in tackling several of these challenges.

**i. Integration of Princely kingdoms:** One of the most

difficult difficulties was bringing over 560 princely kingdoms into a single India. Monarchs ruled these states autonomously, and British agreements granted them varied degrees of authority.

**ii. Partition and the Aftermath:** The partition of India in 1947, as enacted by the Indian Independence Act, resulted in significant population transfers and communal violence. The hurried drawing of borders led in the displacement of nearly 15 million people, which was accompanied by horrific killings.

**iii. Framing a New Constitution:** One key duty was to draft a constitution that would remove existing British legislation and provide a foundation for independent India. This entailed balancing various interests and ideas for the country's future.

**iv. Integration of Princely States:** Patel, often known as the "Iron Man of India," and V.P. Menon are credited for successfully negotiating the merger of princely states into India. His strategy to ensuring their accession included diplomacy, persuasion, and toughness.

**v. Managing the Partition:** Patel recognized that the division of the subcontinent into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan was unavoidable and necessary. Throughout the partition, he was concerned with protecting India's interests.

**vi. Influence on Constitution Making:** While the search results do not directly state Patel's role in constitutional debates, his pragmatic approach and emphasis on practical solutions most definitely affected the process. He was an important player in the Indian National Congress would have been involved in shaping the objectives and framework of the Constitution.

### **Legal Training and Political Strategies:**

Patel was well-known as a lawyer for his ability to deliver an unbeatable case with precision, as well as his difficult cross-examination of witnesses and British judges. His legal profession refined his talents in situation analysis, argument construction, and client advocacy, which he applied to his political methods.

Patel used his legal expertise to create large-scale campaigns against unjust taxation and to lead resistance movements. His style was realistic and direct, often viewed as brutal, and he effectively led Bardoli's landowners in their fight to rising taxes. This combination of legal knowledge and practical leadership made him a strong force in India's independence movement, earning him the title "*Sardar*".

### **Significance of National Unity Day:**

National Unity Day, observed annually on October 31st, commemorates Vallabhbhai Patel's birth anniversary and recognizes his crucial contribution in integrating India.

Patel, known as the "Iron Man of India," worked alongside V.P. Menon to integrate more than 560 princely republics into a single India as the country gained independence in 1947. Britain's withdrawal did not guarantee India's unity, and Patel strove to ensure that these princely states ruled freely by kings but under British agreements were absorbed into the newly established country.

In 2014, India recognized October 31st as National Unity Day to commemorate Patel's contributions to national unity. The Statue of Unity, a 597-foot (182-meter) statue of Patel, was partly built using iron from discarded tools donated by farmers across India, reflecting his commitment to the country's unity. Patel's lasting reputation is based on his feat of peacefully merging the princely states into the Indian Union, hence politically uniting India.

### **Patel's Main Roles in Government:**

Vallabhbhai Patel held various important positions in the Indian government, particularly following the country's independence in 1947.

- Patel served as India's first Deputy Prime Minister.
- As Minister of Home Affairs, he was in charge of internal security and maintaining law and order.
- Patel also served as the Minister of Information and Broadcasting.
- As Minister of States, he was instrumental in merging the princely states into India's Union.

- Patel served as Ahmadabad's first Indian municipal commissioner from 1917 to 1924, and he was elected municipal president from 1924 to 1928.

### **Patel's Legacy is Recognized Today as:**

Vallabhbhai Patel's legacy is commemorated today by a variety of symbols and awards that recognize his efforts to India's unity and freedom.

**i. Statue of Unity:** A 597-foot (182-meter) statue of Patel was unveiled on October 31, 2018, near Vadodara, Gujarat. When it was first built, it was the world's tallest statue. The statue is partially made of iron from recycled tools donated by farmers across India, representing national unity. The base houses an exhibition hall that chronicles Patel's life, as well as the Wall of Unity, which was built from soil collected from communities around India.

**ii. National Unity Day:** Since 2014, India has observed Patel's birth anniversary on October 31 as National Unity Day.

**iii. "Iron Man of India":** Patel is often referred to as the "Iron Man of India" due to his unwavering determination to unify India. He is credited, along with V.P. Menon, with facilitating the absorption of over 560 princely states into a single India during the country's transition from colonial to independence in 1947.

**iv. Bharat Ratna:** In 1991, Patel received India's highest civilian award, the Bharat Ratna, posthumously.

Vallabhbhai Patel played a significant role in India's war for independence and early years as a nation. Patel, known as the "*Iron Man of India*," collaborated with V.P. Menon to bring over 560 princely republics into a single India. He was India's first Deputy Prime Minister and held several significant cabinet roles, including Minister of Home Affairs and Minister of State. Patel's realistic and resolute leadership helped to unite the country as it transitioned from colony to sovereign nation. His legacy is celebrated with the Statue of Unity and National Unity Day. Patel's long fame is based on his feat of peacefully merging the princely Indian republics into the Indian Union and political unification of India.

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